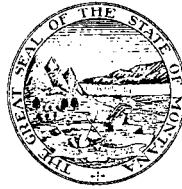


OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

July 18, 2008

Ed Schafer, Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer,

I write to you today to express my disappointment with the recent Bridger-Teton National Forest decision to re-authorize for 20 years the State of Wyoming's use of Forest Service lands to continue elk feeding activities at five feedgrounds.

The concern regarding the spread of disease at the 20-some feedgrounds in Wyoming is well-established. In making this decision, the Forest Service referenced the August 30, 2004 analysis, "Elk Feedgrounds in Wyoming." On the first page of the document, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department acknowledges the problem:

"Early wildlife managers did not foresee the consequential problems elk feedgrounds would create. While the creation of feedgrounds addressed the problems of elk die-offs and damage to stored hay crops, it exacerbated the problem of disease transmission. What started as a logical solution to some very real problems has become one of the most complex and controversial wildlife management challenges of the 21st century."

Despite longstanding acknowledgement of the problem, it now appears that Wyoming Game and Fish and USDA are the only two entities who believe these feedgrounds are not a major contributing factor to the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) being the last remaining reservoir for brucellosis in the nation. Idaho has recently lost and regained its brucellosis free status. Wyoming has done the same, but currently is again facing loss of its status. Montana has now experienced its second case of brucellosis in a cattle herd, and USDA is poised to revoke the state's status. In each state, the evidence points to elk-to-cattle transmissions.

Secretary Ed Schafer
Page Two
July 18, 2008

Montana has done everything in its power to prevent the transmission of brucellosis to its cattle herd. The state has maintained temporal and spatial separation between bison and livestock. Producers in the GYA have cooperated with the Montana Board of Livestock on best management practices. Along with the Department of Interior and conservation organizations, the state has committed to securing the funding necessary for the Royal Teton Ranch grazing agreement that eliminates the risk of transmission to the largest cattle operation near the Park.

Meanwhile, USDA has insisted upon application of antiquated herd-to-herd regulations for disease transmission in cattle that have nothing to do with transmission from wildlife. As a result, Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming at best continue to experience a yo-yo effect with respect to brucellosis status. At worst, the net effect is a permanent loss of status.

In past correspondence (enclosed) and discussions with Secretary Johanns, and in more recent discussions with you, I have pointed to the inconsistent policies between Interior and USDA. I have asked the agencies to partner with the state in a cohesive manner. The current decision on feedgrounds, however, is inconsistent within USDA. The Forest Service has taken a firm step to continue franchising the feeding of elk, while APHIS continues to employ outdated, inapplicable, and heavy-handed regulations, and threatens the state with loss of its brucellosis status.

This is not the partnership I had in mind. I have twice signed the Greater Yellowstone Interagency Brucellosis Committee MOU—first in 2006 and most recently last month. From my current conversations with the governors of Idaho and Wyoming, it now appears that Idaho is ready to sign, while Wyoming is not. I am questioning the wisdom of signing this document, when it has not been demonstrated to me that all parties are truly committed to finding realistic solutions.

As I have stated previously, I remain hopeful for a unified approach and forward-looking ideas from the federal government.

Sincerely,


BRIAN SCHWEITZER
Governor